

Guantanamo Bay Naval Base and Ecological Crises

CASE NUMBER: 42

CASE MNEMONIC: GUANTANAMO

CASE NAME: Guantanamo Crises

A. IDENTIFICATION

1. The Issue

Cuba's Guantanamo Bay is the site of the United States' oldest overseas naval base. A product of the Platt Amendment of 1903, Guantanamo Bay Naval Base has served as a strategic military installation in the region for the United States during its formative years as a world power. More recently, the base served less as an outpost crucial to U.S. defense, but as a sanctuary for Cubans fleeing their country. Since the Cuban Revolution of 1959, the continually confrontational policies between the United States and Cuba created a veritable trade in emigres, in which Guantanamo played a central role by providing housing and shelter for those Cubans who attempted to leave the island by raft. However, the base is also home to a number of endangered plant and animal species including virgin forest. In the most recent of Guantanamo's crises, the bay's ecology was narrowly spared the immense strain of thousands of Cuban refugees interned at the base. In fact, although documentation remains sparse, the 30-year history of being centered between two adversarial nations has had both positive and negative effects on Guantanamo's ecology.

2. Description

The Guantanamo Bay area is a semi-arid desert very similar to the climate found in San Diego, California. With predominantly dry, sunny days ranging from 80 degrees to 90 degrees Fahrenheit, nearly one-fourth of Guantanamo's total average annual rainfall of 24 inches occurs in October. Not surprisingly, the majority of green vegetation in the region is the product of the base's irrigation system. The rest of the area contains parched, brown land and woody plants and succulents capable of enduring the scarcity of water. Guantanamo is also the site of the "Cactus Curtain" -- an eight-mile stretch of thousands of Nopalea cactus along the northeastern section of the Guantanamo Naval Base fence. During the fall of 1961, in the wake of the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Castro regime gave substance to the already-named boundary between the base and Cuban territory in an attempt to physically deter Cubans from using the base as a means of escape from the island. 1

Guantanamo bay is situated in the belt of the Caribbean trade winds; it receives sea breezes from the southeast during the afternoons, and, shortly after sunset, the wind

changes to a northerly direction and becomes a land breeze. The constant breezes help to keep the bay cooler than most semi-arid deserts. However, the mountains that surround the bay to the west, north, and east shelter it from cloud systems, thus producing less precipitation and maintaining the land's aridity. 2

Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, or "Gitmo" as it is commonly referred to, covers an area of 71 square miles, of which 23 square miles are water and the rest is either solid ground (approximately 35 square miles) or swampland (13 square miles). More than 7,000 people are stationed within the compound permanently, 3,000 of which are military personnel, while the rest are their families and support staff. Additionally, there is a floating population of thousands composed of Naval crews in transit. The bay has 42 anchorages and the port can accommodate the largest ships in the U.S. Navy. Not surprisingly, the base is very active, with aircraft and helicopter carriers, cruisers, destroyers, frigates, and even submarines entering and exiting the port daily. Within a mile from the mouth of the bay, the ocean floor drops to 100 fathoms deep. Such accommodations have helped to maintain the importance of Gitmo as a strategic post throughout the Cold War.³

Although the bay area is not richly endowed by nature, the landscape is impressive in its own right: scores of watchtowers -- both Cuban and U.S. -- mark the barren land and line the miles of metal fencing that separate the base from Cuban territory. On the U.S. side lies one of the densest mine fields in the world, with an estimated 735 acres containing 70,000 antipersonnel and antitank mines. In fact, it is not unheard of for wild animals inside the base to set off the explosives. Moreover, the world's largest active mine field has claimed twenty human lives since the mines were laid in 1962 during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The twenty victims were Marines, sailors, and Cubans fleeing from repression. Marines assigned to maintaining the mine field work every day, checking each mine and replacing it if necessary. At a constant rate of maintenance, the Marine Corps estimates that every mine in the field will be checked once every four years.⁴

Beyond military activity, life on the base is directly related to Guantanamo's ecology. Given the climate, the lion's share of recreational activities are outdoors. Such activities include tennis, archery, horseback riding, football, softball, and soccer among other sports. There are playing fields for softball and football, concrete courts for basketball, and even four open-air theaters where films are shown nightly. Also, for a relatively minimal cost, Gitmoites can play eighteen holes of golf. The course, maintained by thirty thousand gallons of water a day (see GOLF case), resembles eighteen miniature oases. In order to play, Golfers need to bring "Gitmo rolls," or strips of astro Turf carried in golf bags to place on the parched fairways in between the putting greens. Furthermore, there is a short hunting season each year when hunters can bag deer, dove, pigeon, and other birds. Hunters are accompanied by a volunteer game warden. Like most American hunters, conservation and respect for the ecology is an important part of the experience. Thus, the close interaction between humans and nature at Guantanamo still yields a sustainable relationship.⁵

Given Guantanamo's surroundings, water sports are the main form of recreation. The bay's waters are populated by crustaceans, coral, and thousands of species of tropical fish. Thus, skin diving is a popular pastime. Sun bathing is even more popular, and the bay-side beaches have been dredged and pooled to protect bathers from the undertow and swift tidal current in the bay. The beaches are one source of obvious ecological strain. Some of the beaches are littered with beer and soda can tabs strewn in the sand, and the sand is trampled like many other resort beaches in Cuba. Furthermore, the dredging and constant water traffic place obvious strains on the delicate coral reefs that line the bay and stretch from the Antilles to the Florida Keys (see CUBA and CORAL cases). But not all Gitmo beaches are overrun with human activity. Cuzco beach for example, is a designated nature preserve. At Cuzco, there is no dredged bathing area, and litter is more carefully controlled. The number of visitors to the area is limited, and shells, fish, and coral are not allowed to be removed. 6

Despite the practice of conservation at Gitmo, not all practices were adopted automatically. In fact, serious water conservation began just as the water supply ran out. On February 6, 1964, Castro accused the United States of using more water than it paid for. He subsequently cut off the base's water supply, but, by doing so, he also forfeited the main source of monetary compensation for the presence of the base, namely the monthly water payments of fourteen thousand dollars. Although Cuba is entitled to compensation for the lease of Guantanamo through the Platt Amendment (see below), the Castro regime has only accepted one payment on the lease. Aside from the \$7.8 million in annual salaries of Cuban workers on the base, many of whom were dismissed during the water crisis, Gitmo had become self-sufficient as the base began generating its own electricity three years prior to the crisis.⁷

But, at the time of the crisis, Gitmo had only fourteen million gallons of water stored on the base. Therefore, the Navy mandated strict conservation guidelines. Water for home use was available during one-hour periods, three times per day. All nonessential use of water, including laundry, was prohibited. The base's seven swimming pools were closed. By the end of the year, a desalination plant with four boilers and fresh water evaporators was installed at the base. The plant is capable of providing 3 million gallons of fresh water daily. Since the crisis, lawn watering is permitted only one-half hour each day; washing cars is similarly limited to certain hours. Moreover, to ensure that restrictions were maintained, the Navy created its own full-time Energy Team to reduce waste of water and electricity. With a barrage of energy-saving tips and public announcement to base residents of daily energy use, the Navy's conservation campaign saved over one million dollars in water and electricity by 1980. The Energy Team also focuses on waste in the Bay and coordinates with Gitmo's Port Services to prevent oil waste by anchoring ships. Consequently, one of Guantanamo's first ecological crises, a result of political tension between two adversarial nations, was resolved through a campaign of self-sufficiency and ecological awareness. 8

Despite the base's prudent ecological policy, for the last thirty years, the ecology of Guantanamo Bay was most recently threatened by the confrontational policies of both the United States and Cuba. Demonstrating an increasingly coercive policy toward Cuba, the

United States tightened its economic embargo against the island in 1992 (see CUBA case). Under the weight of the increased economic sanctions and depleted economic assistance from the former Soviet Union, illegal emigration from Cuba became a "safety valve" for the distressed island economy and a political tool against a confrontational United States. The clash of the two adversarial policies established a kind of trade in emigres, where the United States inherited the fruits of its economically coercive policy. The politics of immigration to the United States placed Guantanamo in the middle of a crisis which threatened to repeat the disastrous political effects of the Mariel boatlift of 1981).

The transformation of U.S.-Cuba immigration policy began as early as August 1994, when economic hardship and popular disaffection on the island threatened to erupt into a mass exodus of Cubans similar to the Mariel boatlift of 1980. At the end of the Cold War, Cuba's "independence" from Soviet subsidies, and nearly all other sources of external financing, initiated a production crisis which resulted in a major economic contraction. From 1989 to 1994, Cuban earnings from exports dropped from \$5.4 billion to \$1.7 billion. After the termination of the annual Soviet subsidy of \$2.1 million, sugar production decreased by fifty percent. As exports and foreign earnings decreased, imports also declined from \$8.1 billion in 1989 to \$2.3 billion in 1994. Thus, the removal of Soviet economic assistance created a financial vacuum: the lack of subsidies caused a drop in export production, which resulted in lower foreign exchange earnings, which, in turn, resulted in the purchase of fewer foreign inputs that were crucial to the production process. In the same period, gross domestic product (GDP) decreased by more than thirty-five percent. Because of their dire economic situation, the Cuban people subsisted largely on one meal per day, and electricity blackouts occurred four days per week. 9

Understandably, the beginning of August 1994 was marked by considerable political tension in Cuba. For example, a number of fishing boats were hijacked by disaffected Cubans attempting to escape to the United States. From July to August, at least 37 asylum seekers and two Cuban officials were killed in a series of boat hijackings. However, the tension reached its zenith on August 5, 1994 when rumors that boats from Miami had landed to rescue disaffected Cubans led thousands to the streets in a virtual repeat of the Mariel crisis. But this time the government was not letting people leave, and police sent to disperse the crowd sparked a riot in Havana's streets. The mob clashed with authorities, shouted anti-government slogans, and vandalized a hotel and tourist-dollar stores in the island's worst civil unrest since 1959.¹⁰

On August 13, Fidel Castro gave a televised speech blaming the United States for the riots and hijackings. He blamed Radio Martí broadcasts from the United States for encouraging Cubans to flee the island. Furthermore, Cubans widely regarded a July 18 speech by President Bill Clinton, denouncing the "brutality" of the Cuban government for sinking a hijacked tug and drowning thirty-one emigres, as indicative of the administration's sympathy toward potential rafters and their likelihood of asylum in the United States. Castro threatened to allow Cubans to exit the country freely if the United States did not deter potential boat-people and return those hijackers who had reached American shores. Then, in the absence of any subsequent deterrent statement from the

United States to the would-be emigres, Castro indicated he would not prevent Cubans from leaving. The next week, over 4000 Cubans launched make-shift vessels to navigate the Florida Straits. 11

Castro's nod to local authorities to allow Cubans to traverse the Florida Straits resulted in an influx of 32,000 refugees to the United States during the summer of 1994. Although the new wave of refugees did not rival Mariel in number, the crisis was sufficient to arouse American immigration fears and overturn a policy that had been in place for decades. The crisis had three major turning points and thus progressed in three phases: the "holding out" phase of August 19, 1994, the "giving in" phase of September 9, 1994, and the retrenching phase in which the secret immigration accord of May 2, 1995 was concluded.

By August 19, 1994, the flow of rafters reaching U.S. shores had increased to 500 per day. As a result, the administration announced the end to the three-decade-old policy of granting asylum to all Cubans as political refugees and stated that the Coast Guard would no longer bring interdicted Cubans to the United States but would hold them at Guantanamo Bay. Furthermore, in an attempt to punish Castro, Clinton cut off cash remittances to Cuba from relatives in the United States, restricted charter flights to the island, and ordered Radio Marti to inform potential boat people that their journey to Florida would end at Guantanamo. By August 24, 1994, Attorney General Janet Reno announced that those fleeing Cuba would be detained in Guantanamo indefinitely. Confirming the American "holding out" policy, Undersecretary of State Peter Tarnoff claimed that the United States could "manage the crisis for as long as necessary. 12

But the new policy soon collided with the increasing inability of the United States to effectively detain the rafters. The next week marked the peak of the crisis as 12,575 rafters left Cuba for Florida. On August 24 alone, 3,096 refugees were interdicted. Moreover, with Haitian refugees already protesting their indefinite detainment at Guantanamo, and thousands of Cubans now being diverted to the naval base, the camp was swelling. To relieve the mounting pressure on the naval base, U.S. diplomats solicited other countries to accept the Cuban refugees for internment, but most were wary of the indefinite time limit. For example, the Turks and Caicos Islands were only willing to allow refugees to stay for six months. Panama agreed to a similar arrangement for the use of its safe haven facilities. 13

Despite the announcement of the radical change in policy, the following month began with incoming refugees totaling 10,269. Concerned about the continuing exodus, the Clinton Administration initiated negotiations with the Castro regime. By September 9, 1994, the United States and Cuba signed an accord under which the United States agreed to admit at least 20,000 Cubans per year directly from Cuba through legal channels. The U.S. Interests Section in Havana estimated that this number would comprise approximately 7,000 refugees and family members, 8,000 immigrant visa recipients and their families, and 5,000 paroled through the Special Cuban Migration Program -- a special lottery. In exchange, the Cuban government announced that it would "prevent unsafe departures using mainly persuasive methods." These agreements became the

foundation upon which the Tarnoff-Alarcón accord was based. Within one week, Cuban emigration virtually halted, and the rest of the month produced less than 900 additional illegal departures. 14

The United States soon granted parole to certain categories of Cubans in the safe haven camps at Guantanamo Bay. On October 14, 1994, refugees over age 70, along with unaccompanied minors and those with serious medical conditions, received parole into the United States. By December, the Attorney General announced that parole would be considered on a case-by-case basis for children, who would be adversely affected by extended stays in safe havens, and their immediate families. These four categories of paroled refugees were commonly referred to as the "four protocols. 15

During the final phase of the crisis, the administration devoted its attention to the 21,000 detainees left at Guantanamo. Their dilemma involved paroling the detainees not classified within the four protocols from Guantanamo to the United States without, at the same time, encouraging another mass exodus of rafters from Cuba. The administration's response to the dilemma was to conduct secret negotiations with Cuba to build on the agreements of September 9 and implement a policy prior to its announcement -- in a preemptive action against any potential resumption of the crisis. On May 2, 1995, the White House announced that Cubans interdicted at sea would no longer be taken to safe haven at Guantanamo, but would be returned to Cuba where they could apply for entry into the United States through legal channels at the U.S. Interests Section in Havana. Meanwhile, only those Cubans remaining at Guantanamo by the time of the announcement would be considered for parole into the United States. Thus, the new accord effected the overturning of the Cuban Adjustment act of 1966 which allowed entry to any Cuban emigrating to the United States, by legal or illegal means. 16

At the height of the crisis, the indefinite detainment of Cuban rafters at Guantanamo threatened irreparable damage to the ecology. With 21,000 detainees at the base, space for housing refugees was scarce. The lack of adequate space in which to detain the Cubans placed a large section of scrub forest at the southeast end of the base at risk of being cleared. But the forest had become the home of over 80 rare and endangered plant and animal species. As Gitmo grew and evolved, much of the native forest, including that of the southeast end, lay undisturbed. By the time of the crisis, the still-standing virgin forest had become the last sanctuary for several plant and animal species on the island. Cuban citizens, squeezed by the economic crisis, had cut down much of the island's forests for fuel, and hunted to near-extinction several of the island's indigenous species to supplement their meager food supply. Therefore, the forest inside the U.S. Naval Base has become a de facto nature sanctuary. 17

According to Dr. Alberto Arecas, Chief Botanist of the National Museum for Natural History in Havana, Gitmo holds the richest vegetation of its kind in all the West Indies. Because the U.S. Navy has never used the entire 35-square miles of land in bay area, the base has preserved sections of very pristine vegetation. Arecas has identified 18 different species of cacti in or around the base, some of which exist nowhere else in the world. Moreover, Gitmoites have for years been aware of the unusually large animal species that

live in the protected woodlands. For example, the rock iguana, protected from predation by hungry Cubans, grows to a length of five feet on the rocky coast of the bay. The Cuban python grows to over 10 feet at Gitmo. Throughout the rest of the island, the Cuban Python is smaller and more rare because it is commonly hunted for its use in native religious rituals. 18

Also, Dr. Blair Hedges, a herpetologist at Penn State University, discovered that the rare hutia was thriving at Gitmo. These small mammals resemble a groundhog or a marmot with a yellow-colored fur. Related to guinea pigs, the hutias' only remaining home may well be at Guantanamo. Commonly called "banana rats" by residents of the base, hutias live in abundance at Guantanamo, but their existence in other parts of the world has eluded Dr. Hedges' awareness. 19

The Navy's announcement in late August 1994 to clear unused sections of the base to house the arriving refugees sparked a wave of protest from international biologists including Arcas and Hedges. The Philadelphia-based Center for Tropical Conservation was among those leading the effort. It asked prominent biologists around the world to contact the Department of Defense and urge the Navy to reconsider the harm such a decision would cause to the bay's ecology. Under intense international scrutiny and attention, a spokesman for the U.S. Atlantic Fleet, which controls Gitmo, announced on September 1, 1994 that there would be enough space for the new arrivals without having to disturb the forest. In anticipation of more refugees, Atlantic Command chose to avoid international controversy and to place refugees instead on the golf course and radio range, where there were already pre-existing fields.²⁰

Thus, another ecological crisis -- indeed, a much greater crisis than the water shortage of 1964 -- avoided irreparable damage to the fragile preserve that has developed at Guantanamo. In light of the international attention placed on Guantanamo because of the crisis, there is reason to hope that the confrontational policies between the United States and Cuba can be mitigated without another migration crisis and potential devastation of Guantanamo's ecology.

3. Related Cases

For a more detailed discussion of Cuba's recent economic difficulties, see [CUBA](#) case. See also [CORAL](#) case, [GOLF](#) case, and Keywords Cases.

Keywords Cases

(1): Trade Product =	IMMIGration
(2): Bio-Geography =	CARIBbean Islands
(3): Environmental Problem =	HABITat Loss

4. *Draft Author.* Stephen A. Lisio

B . LEGAL Cluster

5. *Discourse and Status:* DISagreement and INPROGress

6. *Forum and Scope:* CUBA and REGION

7. *Decision Breadth*: 2 (U.S. and CUBA)

Although Guantanamo Bay is leased to the United States by Cuba through a provision of the Platt Amendment, the United States enjoys considerable latitude in making decisions that affect the ecology on the 3 square-mile naval base.

8. *Legal Standing*: TREATY

The Platt Amendment: "That to enable the United States to maintain the independence of Cuba, and to protect the people thereof, as well as for its own defense, the government of Cuba will sell or lease to the United States land necessary for coaling or naval stations at certain specified points, to be agreed upon with the President of the United States." (From U.S. Statutes at Large, XXI, 897-898; Treaty between the United States and Cuba, signed in Havana, May 22, 1903; proclaimed by President Theodore Roosevelt July 2, 1904.) 21 The main points concerning the U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay are:

1. Cuba retains ultimate sovereignty over the area.
2. The United States can lease the area indefinitely. The lease can be voided only by the United States abandoning the area or by mutual agreement of the two countries.
3. The United States cannot expand the area of the base and must maintain boundaries by a well-marked perimeter fence.
4. Commercial, industrial, or private enterprises are not permitted.
5. The base cannot be used as a safe have for fugitives wanted under Cuban law. Such individuals shall be delivered upon demand to Cuban authorities.
6. No material, merchandise, or munitions are to be transported into Cuban territory.
7. Cuba and its trading partners are guaranteed free access to Cuba through the bay.
8. The United States pays an annual rent of \$4,0235 for the lease of the base.*
9. The base cannot be used as a port of entry to or exit from Cuba *Only one rent check has been cashed since Fidel Castro took over the Cuban Government in 1959. That was in the first full year of his control of Cuba. 22

C . GEOGRAPHIC Cluster

9. *Geographic Locations*

- a. Geographic Domain: North America (NAMER)
- b. Geographic Conflict Site: CARIBbean
- c. Geographic Impact Area: CUBA

10. *SubNational factors*: Yes

Decisions to the detriment or the benefit of the ecology of the naval base at Guantanamo Bay have been made by the United States and the U.S. Atlantic Command. Ironically, the base has become a de facto nature preserve on the island that protects endangered plant and animal species from a country desperate for natural resources. Also, as a result of Guantanamo's crises, the base has become an example of successful conservation of resources. However, such resources are always vulnerable given the potential crises between the United States and Cuba.

11. *Type of Habitat*: TROPical and OCEAN

D. TRADE Cluster

12. Type of Measure: Not applicable [NAPP]

13. Direct vs. Indirect Impacts: DIRECT and INDIRECT

The use of the base as a proving ground for munitions and the detainment of Cuban rafters has a direct impact on various plant and animal species, either because their habitat may be directly damaged or spared. The use of the bay as an area of recreation has indirect effects on the ocean habitat surrounding the coast. See CUBA and CORAL cases.

14. Relation of Trade Measure to Environmental Impact

- a. Directly Related: Yes Exercises, Refugee Detainment
- b. Indirectly Related: Yes Beach Recreation
- c. Not Related: No
- d. Process Related: Yes HABITat Loss

15. Trade Product Identification: Emigration

16. Economic Data
 Given that the most recent migration crisis between the United States and Cuba was largely a result of popular disaffection and economic hardship on the island, two tables of data are appropriate. Table "A", provided below, demonstrates the decline in Cuban GDP since 1989, while Table "B" is a measure of the flow of rafters during the crisis. (For more discussion on Cuba's 6-year economic crisis, see CUBA case.)

Table A: Cuban GDP
(in \$ millions)

	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993
1994	19,177	18,602	16,611	14,684	12,482
	12,569*				

*The 0.7% increase in GDP measured in 1994 can be deceptive. Although such a figure represents the end of an uncontrollable economic contraction, it is not necessarily an indication of economic recovery. Cuba has endured an intense contraction in its economy over a short period of time. Subsequently, an increase in GDP must be measured relative to the extremely low level of economic activity in which it occurred. Indeed, for Cuba to return to its pre-crisis standard of living, the island economy must grow at a constant rate of 7% until the year 2003.

Table B: Cuban Rafters

1991	1992	1993	1994	May 1995
2203	2557	3656	27,139	0

(Sources: Table A: Jatar; Table B: Casa de Las Americas Report)

17. Impact of Measure on Trade Competitiveness: NAPP

18. Industry Sector: SOTH

19. Exporters and Importers: MANY and U.S.

At the time of the crisis, several refugees from Haiti were also detained indefinitely at Guantanamo. After the U.S. intervention in Haiti in September 1994, Haitians were gradually repatriated.

E. ENVIRONMENT Cluster

20. Environmental Problem Type: Habitat Loss

21. Name, Type, and Diversity of Species

Name: MANY

Type: MANY

Diversity: (CUBA)

The most disastrous effects of the crisis were avoided. Potentially, the most ecological damage would have occurred in the clearing of the virgin forest located on the base, which is home to several plant and animal species endangered on the island. In this respect, Guantanamo has served as a nature preserve that remains in limbo between the United States and Cuba.

22. Resource Impact and Effect: LOW

23. Urgency of Problem: MEDIUM

The immediacy of habitat loss at Guantanamo is directly related to the state of crisis or calm presently affecting the naval base. However, its small area relative to the island makes Guantanamo significant only as a remote preserve for endangered species on the island. Ecological damage at the base is not a significant threat to the larger environment, except to biodiversity.

24. Substitutes: NAPP

F. OTHER Factors

25. Culture: Yes

The persistence of an antagonistic relationship between the United States and Cuba has also had a considerable cultural impact on those Cubans who have either fled to, or work at, Guantanamo. Cubans who work at the base, like those who have fled the island, are commonly referred to as "gusanos" (literally, "worms") or "traitors" and they are chastised by Cuban government supporters. Nevertheless, every work day, approximately 80 Cubans enter the base through the northeast gate in the morning and leave through it at night. Prior to the water crisis, some 3,500 Cubans worked on the base. 23

But, by September of 1962, the Cuban government began to discourage Cubans from working at the base. Officials pulled back their inspection operation to a series of barracks-like structures hidden behind a hill about a mile from Guantanamo's northeast gate. They also built a concrete path, lined on both sides by a chain link fence, along

which the commuters were forced to walk from the inspection buildings to the gate of the base. The path was dubbed the "Cattle Chute." At the same time, the Cuban Government stopped its ferry service from waters inside Cuba to the main pier at Gitmo. Thus, a campaign of harassment had begun. 24

To keep their jobs, Cuban workers had to leave early in the morning to catch buses which took them from their villages and towns to the Cuban inspection facilities. There the workers were forced to strip before Cuban inspectors, and walk naked through the facility to a changing room where they were given "Navy base" clothes. No personal possessions were allowed to enter the base, not even glasses, which had to be changed at the facility for a second pair to wear on the base. The strip searches were particularly intimidating and aggravating for women, most of whom quit their jobs after the new policy of intimidation began. Recently, the strip searches have stopped, but workers still have to traverse the Cattle Chute. The grade is so steep that homeward bound workers often stop along the path to rest. 25

With such intimidating conditions, it is difficult to imagine why Cubans continue to work at Gitmo. In fact, the numbers have dwindled from attrition since the water crisis when Castro chose not to allow any more work permits to Cubans wishing to work on the base. Nevertheless, the workers provide the island with yet another small source of foreign hard currency since the commuters must convert their Gitmo wages into Cuban pesos at a one-to-one exchange rate, resulting in a 90 percent loss of buying power. Time-consuming medical exams and inoculations have also discouraged the work force. Nevertheless, base workers have enjoy a well-paid job which includes benefits such as shopping privileges in the Navy Exchange and commissary. Cubans are generally very poor, and they endure food shortages and unemployment. But at Gitmo, Cubans can eat food provided for them by the base, which is usually enough to last them twenty-four hours so that they can donate to their families the meager food ration provided by the Cuban government. Another reason to endure harassment to work at the base is that the workers can use the base post of Eice to communicate with relatives who have fled to the United States.26

26. HumanRights: NO

Although human rights abuses of the Castro regime have been the predominant motivation for Cubans to flee the island, this latest refugee crisis has been widely acknowledged as less a result of political oppression; rather, the crisis was the result of unbearable economic pressure. Furthermore, the refugees detained at Guantanamo received accommodation exceeding the internationally recognized standards of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). 27

27. Trans-Boundary Issues: Yes

Guantanamo functions as a preserve for plant and animal species which are no longer found in the western region of Cuba due to farming, development, or hunting. While the base contains its own nature preserve, the 45-square miles of terrain enclosed by fence protect species from Cubans seeking to supplement their meager food supplies.

28. Relevant Literature

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